

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 OMB-01 AID-05 TRSE-00 EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9795

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 1731

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MR

SUBJ: UNEASE IN MAURITANIA

1. SUMMARY: DURING PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, MAURITANIAN REGIME APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PASSING THROUGH A SORT OF POLITICAL CRISIS. IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF TENSION HAS BEEN RENEWED EFFORT TO FORCE HIGH OFFICIALS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PUBLIC OFFICE AND PRIVATE BUSINESS CONCERNS. AT THE SAME TIME A LARGER "PROGRESSIVE-MODERATE" CLASH MAY ALSO BE UNDERWAY, AND THE FUTURE OF SOME IMPORTANT REGIME CONSERVATIVES HAS BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION. AT PRESENT, PRESIDENT OULD DADDAAH SEEMS TO HAVE STOLEN MARCH ON "PROGRESSIVES" WITH CALL FOR USE OF TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC

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JURISPRUDENCE IN MAURITANIAN COURTS. ALSO ANNOUNCEMENT OF LONG-AWAITED SAUDI LOAN MAY HAVE HELPED TO BOLSTER CONFIDENCE IN REGIME. NEVERTHELESS, THIS GOVERNMENT REMAINS IN STATE OF NEAR BANKRUPTCY, IS NOT WINNING ITS WAR IN THE SAHARA, AND IS PLAGUED WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF CORRUPTION. IN THIS SITUATION, OPPOSITION TO THE OULD DADDAAH REGIME, SO FAR WEAK AND

DISUNITED, COULD GAIN STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

2. IT APPEARS THAT DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN SOME SORT OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE UNDERWAY WITHIN GHT MAURITANIAN REGIME. SOME ASPECTS OF THIS TENSION HAVE BEEN APPARENT TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER, BUT THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A GOOD DEAL OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES MANEUVERING. WHILE THE STRUGGLE MAY NOT YET BE OVER, IT APPEARS FOR THE MOMENT TO HAVE REACHED A STANDOFF, AND THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO TRY TO ASSESS WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND THE LIKELY FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS.

3. FIRST INDICATION THAT SOMETHING WAS AFOOT WAS REMOVAL ON MAY 30 OF FINANCE MINISTER BA IBRAHIMA AND HIS REPLACEMENT BY MAURITANIAN CENTRAL BANK DIRECTOR AHMED OULD DADDAH. BA'S SIN WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN OWNERSHIP OF STOCKS IN PRIVATE COMPANY. RUMOR MILL'S "REAL" REASONS FOR HIS DEMISE RANGE FROM MOOR-BLACK CONFRONTATION (BA'S DISMISSAL OF HIGH MOORISH OFFICER IN FINANCE MINISTRY SIX MONTHS AGO IS SAID TO HAVE OUTRAGED MOORS) TO PERSONALITY CLASH WITH PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH.

4. SHORTLY AFTER BA'S REMOVAL, REGIME BROUGHT AN ANTI-CONFLICT OF INTEREST CAMPAIGN INTO PUBLIC VIEW. ON JUNE 7 PRESIDENT GAVE PRESS INTERVIEW REITERATING HIS VIEW

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THAT HIGH CIVIL SERVANTS COULD NOT ENGAGE IN PRIVATE BUSINESS. NATIONAL POLITICAL BUREAU (BPN) OF MAURITANIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY ECHOED THIS STAND IN A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED JUNE 13 FOLLOWING TWO DAYS OF MEETINGS. PRESIDENT'S WIFE, MARIEM, IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN A MOVING FORCE BEHIND CAMPAIGN WHICH IS BELIEVED TO HAVE COST SOME TWENTY MIDDLE AND HIGH LEVEL FUNCTIONARIES THEIR JOBS.

5. FOREGOING DEVELOPMENTS ARE WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE STEMMED FROM EFFORT BY "PROGRESSIVE" ELEMENTS WITHIN REGIME TO STRIKE A BLOW AT "MODERATES" WHO HAVE COME TO HOLD UPPER HAND IN GOVERNMENT. DURING ITS RECENT MEETING, BPN IS SAID TO HAVE SET UP COMMISION OF INQUIRY INTO CORRUPT PRACTICES HEADED BY FISHERIES MINISTER ISMAEL, A FORMER MEMBER OF KADIHINE OPPOSITION AND AVOWED LEFTIST. COMMISION REPORTED TO HAVE 120 CASES OF ALLEGED MALFEASANCE ON ITS AGENDA. ALSO, HIGH YOUTH COUNCIL, WHOSE PRESIDENT, TIDJANI OULD KERIM, IS FORMER MEMBER OF KADHINE, ADDRESSED A COMMUNICATION TO BPN MEETING PRAISING ANTI-CONFLICT OF INTEREST DRIVE AND CALLING FOR RETURN TO SOCIALIST PURITY. APART FROM OFFICIALS ALREADY REMOVED, TARGETS OF "PROGRESSIVES" ARE SAID TO BE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFARIS, CONSTRUCTION, INTERIOR AND PLAN. FIRST TWO, OULD MOUKNASS AND SALAH, ARE AMONG PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH'S CLOSE CONFIDANTS.

6. NEXT POLITICAL EVENT WAS REGIME'S HEAVY STRESS ON BPN'S JUNE 13 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HENCEFORTH ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE (SHARI'A) WOULD BE BASIS OF MAURITANIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND THAT COMMISSION UNDER PARTY AFFAIRS MINISTER OULD BOYE HAD BEEN FORMED TO STUDY HOW NECESSARY CHANGES WOULD BE MADE. EXACTLY HOW TRANSFORMATION IS TO COME ABOUT HAS YET TO BE REVEALED. MANY BELIEVE IT NEVER WILL. NEVERTHELESS, DECISION WAS FOLLOWED BY SERIES OF WELL ORGANIZED AND CLOSELY GUARDED DEMONSTRATIONS OF SUPPORT AROUND COUNTRY AND BY APPROVING MESSAGES FROM VARIOUS ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS.

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7. POLITICALLY INTERESTED PEOPLE IN NOUAKCHOTT GENERALLY SEE ISLAMIC REVIVAL AS ATTEMPT BY CONSERVATIVES IN REGIME TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM "PROGRESSIVE"-INSPIRED PURGE, AND, INDEED, CONFLICT OF INTEREST CAMPAIGN HAS FADED FROM VIEW, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. PRESS HAS NOT MENTIONED SUBJECT FOR TWO WEEKS. FURTHER, HIGH YOUTH COUNCIL, WHOSE COMMITMENT TO ISLAMIC ORTHODOXY BELIEVED LESS THAN TOTAL, WENT ON RECORD OVER NEARLY HALF PAGE IN OFFICIAL DAILIES IN SUPPORT OF SHARI'A DECISION. THIS OUTPOURING ADDS WEIGHT TO VIEW THAT SHARI'A ANNOUNCEMENT HAS TAKEN WIND

OUT OF "PROGESSIVES" SAILS.

8. COMMENT: AT THIS WRITING, REGIME'S POLITICAL STOCK SEEMS
TO HAVE RISEN SLIGHTLY ABOVE MID-JUNE LOW. SHARI'A
ANNOUNCEMENT MAY HAVE PERMITTED CONSERVATIVES TO STEAL MARCH
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ON "PROGESSIVES" AND THEIR CONFLICT OF INTEREST PURGE. ALSO,
JUNE 25 ANNOUNCEMENT OF \$29 MILLION SAUDI LOAN TO GIRM MUST
BE WELCOME NEWS TO OULD DADDAH REGIME. SAUDIS HAD APPAR-
ENTLY STOPPED EXTENDING CREDITS TO MAURITANIA IN 1978, AND RUMOR
WAS THAT RIYADH WAS CONCERNED AT POOR STATUS OF MAURITANIAN
FINANCES.

9. THESE SHORT TERM SUCCESSES, HOWEVER, CANNOT DISGUISE GRAVE
DIFFICULTIES WHICH CONFRONT THIS GOVERNMENT. FIRST, GIRM COFFERS
APPEAR NEARLY EMPTY. GOVERNMENT CONSTRUCTION AND HIRING OF NEW
EMPLOYEES HAS BEEN DRASTICALLY CURTAILED, MINISTRIES HAVE IN SOME
CASES NOT PAID BILLS, AND PROVISION OF EVEN MOST MUNDANE SERVICES
HAS BECOME A PROBLEM. LATEST INDICATION OF IN-
SOLVENCY IS VIRTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF MEDICINES FROM MEDICAL CEN-
TERS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. GIRM HAS ADDRESSED URGENT REQUEST TO
FRENCH EMBASSY FOR SUPPLY OF WIDE RANGE OF MOST BASIC MEDICAL
SUPPLIES. FURTHER, GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPT TO SHORE UP NOUAKCHOTT'S
SAGGING ELECTRICAL SUPPLY SYSTEM SAID TO HAVE STALLED LAST WEEK
BECAUSE SENEGALESE CONCERN HAD NOT BEEN PAID FOR REPAIR OF
A GENERATOR. IS SHORT, EVEN NICKELS AND DIMES NEEDED TO MAKE
THIS ECONOMY WORK APPEAR OG BE LACKING.

10. SECOND MAJOR CONCERN IS SAHARA WAR. SITUATION IS STALE-
MATED BOTH DIPLOMATICALLY AND POLITICALLY, BUT POLISARIO REMAINS
CAPABLE OF STRIKING BLOWS AND LETTING WORLD KNOW ABOUT IT.
LATEST EXAMPLES ON MAURITANIAN "FRONT" WERE BLOODYING
OF MAURITANIAN ARMY'S NOSE DURING COMBINED MORROCCAN MAURITANIAN
OPERATION AGAINST GUERRILLAS IN OUM DREIGA REGION
AND JUNE 16 SABOTAGE OF IRON ORE TRAIN. WAR IS EXPENSIVE TO THIS
IMPOVERISHED GOVERNMENT, AND, ALTHOUGH USUALLY FAR REMOVED FROM
MOST POPULATION CENTERS, FIGHTING IS VERY MUCH ON MIND OF GENERAL
PUBLIC.

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1.. LASTLY, APPARENTLY PERVERSIVE CORRUPTION THROUGHOUT GOVERNMENT
IS POLITICAL LIABILITY TO REGIME. ARMY REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO
PERMIT ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION TO LOOK INTO ALLEGED WRONG-
DOING WITHIN MILITARY, AND STORIES OF HANKY-PANKY IN DEFENSE

MINISTRY ARE LEGION. CORRUPTION IS WELL ESTABLISHED FACT OF LIFE IN THIS COUNTRY, AND ITIS HARD TO SEE HOW BPN'S INVESTIGATION COULD PROCEED WITHOUT ALIENATING KEY ELEMENTS OF MAURITANIAN ESTABLISHMENT. NEVERTHELESS, CORRUPT PRACTICES ARE DEBILITATING TO WAR AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND PROVIDE OPPOSTIION TO PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH WITH CONVENIENT WEAPON TO USE AGAINST HIM.

12. IN SHORT, CURRENT SITUATION IN MAURITANIA CAN BE EXPLOITED BY OPPOSITION TO REGIME. AT PRESENT, THIS OPPOSITION IS WEAK AND DISUNITED AND SURFACES ONLY OCCASIONALLY IN A FEW TRACTS WITH VERY LIMITED DISTRIBUTION. STILL, AS LONG AS COUNTRY'S DIFFICULTIES CONTINUE, AND IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL, PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH WILL NEED ALL HIS POLITICAL SKILL TO KEEP HIS OPPONENTS FROM GAINING STRENGTH. DUNBAR

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